

## JESUS & SWORDS

The Bible speaks matter-of-factly about weapons and self-defense, in a world filled with dangers. Just before Jesus was arrested, He gave His disciples some special instructions:

Luke 22:35-38, *"When I sent you with no money bag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything? They said, nothing. He said to them, But now let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in Me: He was numbered with the transgressors. For what is written about me has its fulfillment. And they said, Look, Lord, here are two swords. And He said to them, it is enough."*

**1- PERSONAL RISK.** Things were going to get real for the disciples after His death, as they carried the gospel of the kingdom into a hostile world. They should not expect extraordinary provision every day (as in Luke 10), and should plan accordingly. Jesus' words above took place in the upper room (Luke 22 and John 13-16), after He reminded them that He came to die, that one of them would betray Him, and that He was going where they could not.

Peter said, *"Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."* Jesus said, *"greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If they persecute Me, they will persecute you."* And, *"I have said all these things to keep you from falling way. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God."* And, *"in the world you will have tribulation."* Difficult days began immediately.

**2- GOD'S PROVISION.** The crowd was armed with swords and clubs and soldiers, coming to arrest Christ like a common criminal (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, John 18). Judas drew near to betray Him, *"and when those who were around Him saw what would follow, they said, Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"* Peter took his sword and struck off a man's ear. Jesus said, *"no more of this"* and healed him, saying *"put your sword back in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."* They were outnumbered. But He said, *"do you not think that I cannot appeal to My Father and He will at once send Me more than 12 legions of angels?"*

Jesus was not going to war with twelve men and two swords. Why? *"Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?"* He told Pilate, *"My kingdom is not of this world, and if it were, My servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews."* Jesus was fulfilling prophecy, going to victory by His sacrificial death on the cross. There would be no physical resistance, and disciples' swords were not needed to save Jesus. Unlike Muslims and Hindus and rioters, the kingdom of Christ does not come by force, but by faith.

**3- GOD'S PROTECTION.** Does this mean we should not have swords? Pacifists note no instance in the rest of the Bible of the apostles or believers using a sword, even though they survived numerous dangers. They point to Matthew 5, *"blessed are the meek, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God"* and *"do not resist the one who is evil. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."*

But most scholars understand Matthew 5 as referring to insults, not life-threatening assault, as Jesus warns against seeking vengeance against others. "Christians should not retaliate when persecuted specifically for their Christian faith," observes theologian WA Grudem, "but should take that as part of what God calls them to suffer for the sake of the testimony of the Gospel."

**4- GOD'S PURPOSE.** The Bible presents self-defense as pro-active, pro-life, for personal protection, and includes escape, evasion, and force. Scripture and Biblical Law has informed the responsibility and rights of people for self-preservation throughout the Christian world.

English law in the 900s AD required every freeman of age capable to bear arms to do so. The believers who came to the New World for religious liberty continued this practice. A Virginia statute in 1623 forbade anyone to travel unless well armed, and required all men working in fields to be armed, for protection of the community. A 1631 law required all able men to bear arms, to practice publicly, and to bring arms to church. Landowners who didn't arm their workers paid fines to the church wardens. (Notice also how this expects all the men would be in church every Sunday). The reality is, without guns, you would not be in church today! ☐